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THE CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN

—By—

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The campaign for the possession of Chattanooga commenced with General Rosecrans' advance from Murfreesboro, June 24, 1863. His army was composed of about 60,000 men of all arms, divided into four Army Corps. The advance was made simultaneously by four different roads. The extreme left under Crittenden made a wide detour to the southeast in the direction of McMinnville, the centre under Thomas passed through Hoover's Gap on the road to Manchester, while the right under McCook was headed for Shelbyville, save thirty miles west of south, where 18,000 rebels were encamped under General Polk. General Hardee was at Wartrace, a few miles east, on a branch of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad; Breckenridge had 10,000 more in East Tennessee which, with scattering commands of cavalry and infantry elsewhere, made up an army of 46,000 men.

It was General Rosecrans' evident intention to flank the positions held by the enemy at Wartrace and Shelbyville and force Bragg to fight elsewhere than behind the entrenchments which he had prepared. In this he was unsuccessful for while the passes through the mountains as at Hoover's, Liberty and Guy's Gaps were fortified and defended for a time against the advancing columns of Thomas and McCook, they were soon forced to evacuate and retire or be captured. Three days after the advance commenced the rebels were compelled to leave their fortified camps and retreat to the south or accept the gauge of battle on ground which was not of their own choosing. Bragg took the former alternative and continued to retire until he had crossed the Duck, the Elk and the Tennessee rivers. Tullahoma was evacuated June 30th and occupied the same day by our army. The crossing of the Elk river on July 3rd, was made under difficulties, the rebels climbing into the trees and picking off our men as they advanced. They were finally driven off however, and the crossing was effected by the men stripping and tying their clothes and accoutrements around their necks to prevent their being carried off by the swiftness of the current. As an additional safeguard a rope was thrown across the river and the men held on to this while crossing. Notwithstanding this precaution there was some loss.

It being clear to Rosecrans that Bragg would not fight north of the Tennessee, camping grounds were made at different points up and down the Tennessee as at Bridgeport and Stevenson, Alabama, Winchester, Deckard, Cowan, Pelam and Tracy City, Tennessee. The railroad was immediately repaired and supplies forwarded to Stevenson, Ala., preparatory to another advance. It was not until August 11th. that things were in readiness and the order was given to cross the Tennessee. This was done at four different points, and soon the objective point, Chattanooga, was seriously threatened and its evacuation compelled on September 9th. Pontoon bridges hastily erected by the Pioneer Corps, were the means used to effect a crossing which was accomplished without loss, except at Bridgeport, where the bridge gave way and some artillerymen and horses were precipitated into the water and drowned. It was eleven days before it was repaired, and the guns were recovered later. Then came the march up the steep mountain sides. Only those who have passed through a campaign over a country of this character can appreciate the difficulties to be met and overcome—long trains of ammunition and supplies must be kept close to and safely guarded by the advancing columns in the enemy's country to prevent their loss by a sudden dash. Our march over sand and Raccoon mountains was devoid of exciting incident, the warm, dry weather and the dust making it very trying to man and beast. The same tactics seem to have been applied here by the commanding General that obtained in the summer campaign in Tennessee. The right under McCook, crossed the mountains in a southeasterly direction towards Summerville and threatening Rome, Ga., which is fully sixty miles south of Chattanooga and some thirty miles south of where Bragg was encamped with his whole army.

When McCook's advance under General Sheridan reached Alpine Valley, a hurried order was received to fall back and concentrate with the rest of the army in the vicinity of Lee and Gordon's mill on the west bank of Chickamauga creek. How vividly we recall the suddenness of the movement: there was no rest day or night until that point had been reached. The incidents of that eventful march are still fresh in the minds of all. Tired and sleepy we arrived on the field that was destined to become the mausoleum of so many of our comrades, and historic for the terrific fighting the desperate valor on both sides, and the appalling loss of life. The rebel loss in three day's fighting is said to have been something over 18,000 men, while ours was over 16,000, making a total of about 35,000 men in killed, wounded and missing. The supreme test of American valor came in the repeated charges made against Thomas' lines on the left to break through and secure possession of the Rossville and LaFayette road, and thus cut off the retreat of our army. Had they succeeded in this the historian would have had to record a more-fatal disaster to the Union arms than falling back on Chattanooga the next day by way of Rossville.

D. L. Merkle.

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At this distance to one who has studied the movements, and in the light of history, it hardly seems good military strategy to make an advance upon an unknown enemy concentrated near his own base of supplies with a force scarcely equal in numbers. Negley's Division was thrown far in advance unsupported by the rest of Thomas' Corps, to Stevens' Gap. A combined rebel force of 11,000 men under Generals Hindman and Hill was ordered to open on him on the 9th., his own force being less than one-half that number, and Bragg's whole army in supporting distance. Up to eight o'clock, p. m. of the 9th. Negley seems to have been unaware of his danger and the proximity of the rebel forces, and it was more than twenty-four hours later when he fully realized his danger and took the necessary steps to protect his position and retire without being cut off and his force destroyed. Under impression that Bragg was still retreating the commanding General had ordered the advance until he had reached Davis' Cross Roads one mile west of Dug Gap. It was here that his true situation became known through citizens and scouts—that Pigeon Mountain only separated him from a rebel force double his own. He at once fell back on "Bailey's Cross Roads" and called for reinforcements and was quickly supported by two brigades of Baird's Division so that later when the rebel attack was made by the largely superior force, Negley was enabled to withdraw without losing any either of his artillery or supplies. Owing to disobedience of orders on the part of the rebel commanders Hiddman, Hill and Polk the attack was not made until the 11th though ordered on the 9th. Gen. Crittenden's Division also occupied an exposed position and Gen. Polk was ordered to strike and crush him in detail.

Gen. Bragg seems to have deceived and misled Gen. Rosecrans as to his real intentions through rebel deserters and citizens who uniformly reported him in full retreat on Rome, and it was not until the 12th. inst. that he learned his danger and began concentrating his army in the vicinity of Lee and Gordon's mills to resist an attack by the rebel commander, and at all hazards to hold the LaFayette road. None too soon was the order given, for on the afternoon of the 18th. the premonitory signs of the coming storm were given, when at several different points the rebels attempted the crossing of Chickamauga Creek and were resisted by the cavalry under Wilder, Stanley and Minty, and on the 19th the storm came in all its fury—the deep-mouthed Napoleon was interspersed with the sharper sound of the Rodman and other rifled guns, while the roar of musketry was enough to appal the stoutest heart. Louder and deeper than the roar of Niagara the dogs of war howled, while the serried columns contended for the mastery, sometimes one and then the other giving way before the terrific fury of desperate charges of the opposing force. The rebel commander had placed his all on the success of the battle and the possession of the goal, and hence to him failure meant

much: while to the Union commander it meant the loss of all: his name, his fame and his army. The great error of the Union commander was in the transfer of Wood's Division to the left, causing an opening in the line of battle and exposing Sheridan's Division to destruction or capture, when Longstreet's legions opened on him with front and enflading fires. Repeated charges were made against the advancing columns of the enemy, and here in the forefront of battle our gallant Lytle fell with his face to the foe, and his riderless horse dashed with the fury of a whirlwind back through the Union lines to the rear. Without support, and greatly outnumbered, Sheridan's Division, after a gallant fight, was compelled to fall back, which they did after suffering heavy losses in killed, wounded and missing. Then the rebels were hurled with increased fury against Thomas who sent them back wounded and bleeding so that he well deserved the sobriquet of the "Rock of Chickamauga." A desperate attempt was made near nightfall to turn his left which would probably have been successful had it not been for the arrival of Granger's reserve corps at just the right moment, which, forming at right angles with the line of battle, received them with a galling fire and drove them back disheartened from the field. Rallied by Longstreet they charged again only with the same result. Soon darkness spread her mantle over the bloody scene and as the curtain fell the battle of Chickamauga was over and Thomas withdrew the weary remnant of his army to Rossville for rest but the enemy was too severely punished to follow, and by night of the 21st. the whole army was resting on Chattanooga; and Bragg followed soon after, laying siege to the city to watch for a favorable opportunity to attack, when, as he thought, Rosecrans would attempt the crossing of the Tennessee to effect his escape. In this, of course, as subsequent events proved, he was in error.

It is a well understood fact that a description of a campaign for the possession of Chattanooga would be incomplete without the story of the battle above the clouds by Hooker, and the gallant charge up Missionary Ridge, in which Sheridan's Division, including our own regiment, covered themselves with glory and planted the regimental flag high up on the heights never to be lowered; but I will leave this glorious chapter in our Nation's history to more gifted hands to weave the web and woof of that description.

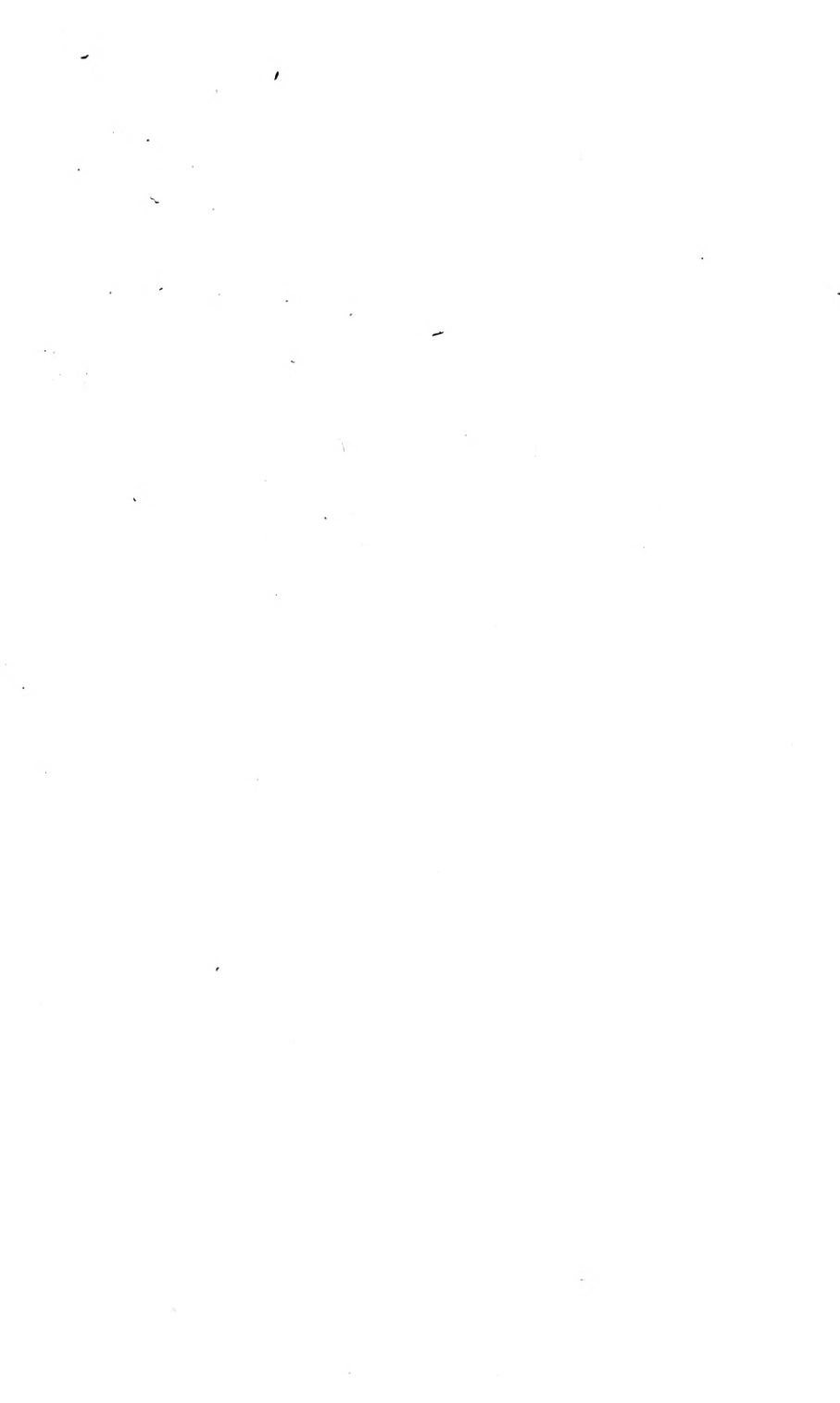
In passing, comrades, I desire to say that if in our judgment errors were made let us, before passing judgment, remember that the principal actors in that great drama have passed away, and are beyond reach of our criticisms. Let us rather shed a tear o'er the bier of our departed commander, who, I have every reason to believe, did the very best he could with the knowledge he had.

And peace, with all its benign influences, is now the heritage of our children bought by the blood of their fathers on those southern battlefields. Dear! bought it was and highly cherished it should be. There is consolation in the thought that the soldier who then sought to destroy our fair land is now equally desirous for its preservation. And to-day we have a united country, with no North, no South, no East, no West: but

A Union of hearts, a Union of hands.

A Union of interests, a Union of lands,

And the Flag of our Union forever.



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